

H1N1 School Dismissal Guidance

Helping to Decrease the Spread of Influenza among Students and Staff Guidance Based Upon Current Level of Illness Severity (September 2009)

The Vermont Department of Health will provide weekly updates on flu activity. There will be different guidance and recommendations if the severity of illness increases.

Schools can obtain information from the Department of Health Web site at healthvermont.gov or by calling the health department (1-800-640-4374 or 802-863-7240).

Vermont Departments of Health and Education's Recommendations on School Dismissal Decisions:

- 1) **Short-term school dismissal is a local superintendent decision.** The Health Department can be consulted regarding the decision to dismiss. Under the current level of influenza severity, if a school is experiencing an influenza outbreak, short-term school dismissal decisions should be made based on staffing and logistical reasons. Once influenza is in the community at large, closing school might temporarily slow transmission within the school, but does not stop overall transmission. When there is ongoing transmission in the community, cases can reoccur once school reopens.
- 2) Local school officials should emphasize the importance of staying home when sick, and sending home those individuals who become sick during the day.
- 3) Health Department recommends that local school officials keep track of the following information:
 - a. School absenteeism rates (if possible, knowing how many are due to influenza-like illness (ILI), defined as a fever of 100° F or higher, and cough or sore throat). Parents should be asked to alert the school if their child is staying home for ILI.
 - b. Number of visits to school health offices and number of students/staff needing to be sent home with ILI, or with significant respiratory illness.
- 4) Health Department recommends that local school officials identifying an increase in ILI:
 - a. Communicate with all parents and staff about the level and type of illness being seen in the school, and the importance of staying home while sick. Continued appearance at school of students/staff who come down with fever at school indicates ongoing risk of transmission within the school.
 - b. Include a reminder that while most flu illness is mild-to-moderate and does not require a visit to the doctor, those with high-risk conditions who become ill with fever and cough or sore throat should consult promptly with their doctor, as should any concerned about severe symptoms.
 - c. Reinforce hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and routine cleaning.
 - d. Do not close schools for cleaning, but continue to perform routine cleaning of frequently used surfaces.

- 5) The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has asked that local school officials dismissing students report this online at:
http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/schools/dismissal_form/
 - a. Note: Please use the “online reporting form.” This ensures that the CDC and Vermont Department of Health are notified of school dismissal.
- 6) Extent of closure is also a local decision to be made by the superintendent, but factors to consider include:
 - a. Is there a school/schools that share the same bus system and/or have children from the same household?
 - b. What is the absenteeism/illness seen at those schools?
 - c. What about other programs in the building, such as Early Essential Education/Head Start; Preschool and after school programs?
- 7) If a school dismisses students, all school functions should be cancelled/postponed (sports events, performances, etc). Students who stay home or are sent home due to ILI should not participate in any evening school functions or other large gatherings at the school until 24 hours after their fever subsides.
- 8) How long should schools stay closed? Health Department recommends only short-term closure (i.e., long weekend or week at most). Closing schools will not stop transmission in a community. It may slow transmission down while schools are closed, but transmission may increase again when school is reopened.
- 9) Upon reopening, schools should reinforce recommendations for staying home when ill, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, and other appropriate measures to help slow the spread of illness.